

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 22 November 2011

By: Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member for Environment, Highways and Waste
Paul Crick, Director of Planning and Environment

Subject: Recommended Marine Conservation Zones

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

At its meeting on 4th November 2010, EHW POSC received a paper on work to develop a suite of recommended Marine Conservation Zones for the south-east. As requested by members at this meeting, this paper presents the recommendations that have been made for sites off the coast of Kent.

Introduction to Marine Conservation Zones

1. The Marine and Coastal Access Act (2009) enabled the creation of a new type of Marine Protected Area, called a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). The purpose of the MCZ is to protect nationally important marine wildlife, geology and geomorphology and sustain and enhance our marine biodiversity resource. MCZs, together with other types of Marine Protected Areas (such as Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protected Areas), will deliver the Government's aim for an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas.
2. The Balanced Seas Project, one of four regional projects established to identify the Recommended Marine Conservation Zones (rMCZ) (in this instance for the seas between the Suffolk/Essex border and Hampshire/Dorset border, including the Thames Estuary and the Solent and out to the median line with France) coordinated a Regional Stakeholder Group that was responsible for recommending the boundaries and conservation objectives for rMCZs in the south-east.
3. Selection of the sites was guided by statutory selection criteria, which set out the conservation principles and targets for the MPA network. The decisions were based not only on the location of habitats and species but also on how the sea is used for both commercial and recreational purposes.
4. In addition to identifying rMCZs, recommended Reference Areas (rRA) have also been identified. These sites will be a different kind of MCZ, managed so that the features within in are fully protected from impact. The purpose of these sites is to return them to as close to a natural state as possible, to act as a benchmark for other MCZs and illustrate how well protection measures within MCZs are working.

Recommended Marine Conservation Zones and Reference Areas off the Kent coast

5. The following Recommended Marine Conservation Zones have been identified off the Kent coast (see Appendix 1 for location):

- Thames Estuary
- Medway Estuary
- The Swale Estuary
- Thanet Coast
- Goodwin Sands
- Offshore Foreland
- Dover to Deal
- Dover to Folkestone
- Folkestone Pomerania
- Hythe Bay

6. The following Recommended Reference Areas have been identified off the Kent coast (see Appendix 1 for location):

- Westgate Promontory
- Turner Contemporary
- Goodwin Knoll
- South Foreland Lighthouse
- Hythe Flats
- Flying Fortress

7. Management measures applied to the sites will be decided on a site-by-site basis and will depend on the level of protection most appropriate to the species or habitats that the site has been designated for. The detailed rMCZs outline the draft conservation objectives for the site and potential management measures required to achieve these. There is a strong preference for the use of voluntary codes of conduct and other user agreement, rather than regulatory measures.

Next steps

8. The rMCZs and rRAs have been submitted to Natural England. Currently, an Impact Assessment is being prepared by the project economist and will estimate the costs and benefits associated with the recommendations, including the costs of potential management measures.

9. Over the coming months, Natural England, JNCC and the MCZ Science Advisory Panel will be assessing whether the recommendations from each of the four regional projects together satisfy the Ecological Network Guidance design criteria and principles. They will submit their statutory advice to Defra early next year.

10. Ministers will then consider all supporting evidence before deciding which MCZs to take forward to the public consultation. This will provide an opportunity for stakeholders to review, comment and feedback to Government before designation decisions are made.

Recommendations

11. POSC is asked to comment on the above Recommended Marine Conservation Zones and advise if they would like to receive a further report during the 2012 consultation period.

References

The full final recommendation report and details of recommended sites can be found at <http://www.balancedseas.org/page/RSG%20Resources.html>

Contact details

Elizabeth Milne, Flood Risk and Natural Environment Manager
elizabeth.milne@kent.gov.uk
01622 221487